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Office of Program Resources Management

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Thursday, February 16, 2006

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STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #4

(Management of Productive, Life-Sustaining Natural Resources Strengthened)

104 ARMM barangays to get electricity

(Source: MindaNews Online – 2/16/06)

GENERAL SANTOS CITY (MindaNews/16 Feb) -- Some 104 more remote barangays in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and neighboring areas would be energized this year under the second phase of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Alliance for Mindanao Off-grid Renewable Energy (Amore 2) program.

Recto Doctor, Amore area manager, said the new recipients of the electrification program were among the 200 barangays in Mindanao that were earlier identified as target areas for the implementation of the five-year Amore 2 program.

He said most of the program's target beneficiaries this year are located in the ARMM, where 60 to 70 percent of the 2,700 barangays in the country without electricity are located.

Amore 2's other beneficiaries are located in the provinces of Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte and Sultan Kudarat.

"These beneficiaries are among the poorest and remotest areas of the island. We intend to help usher in development opportunities in these areas by way of rural electrification," he said.

In support of Amore's second phase, Doctor said Mirant Philippines Foundation, Inc. has committed to infuse an additional P150 million to help install at least 180 photovoltaic battery charging stations and solar home systems and 20 micro hydro power systems until 2009.

Mirant, considered as one of the country's largest energy producer, signed an alliance agreement with the Department of Energy last week.

Ricky de Castro, Mirant Foundation's program manager, said the company's additional funding support for Amore 2 is in line with its previous commitment to energize at least 1,500 of the 2,700 barangays that have no installed power systems.

De Castro said the company has so far helped energize some 1,000 barangays and is now in the process of lighting up the remaining 500.

He said Mirant had linked up with Amore for the electrification of the 20 percent of its target beneficiaries that were located in off-grid areas.

By yearend, De Castro said they expect the coverage of their partnership with Amore to reach at least 300 barangays in Mindanao .

"We made our commitment to continually support the Amore program because we have seen how the once almost barren villages were rebuilt and transformed into productive communities because of it," he added.

The Amore program aims to provide electricity to remote communities, like island barangays, that cannot be reached by existing power lines. It uses stand-alone systems based on clean and sustainable renewable energy.

The facilities installed under the program are administered by the Barangay Renewable Energy and Community Development Associations (Brecda) organized by Amore.

As of December 2005, the program already provided renewable energy systems to at least 6,870 households, 143 community centers and 319 streets in 227 barangays in Tawi-Tawi, Basilan, Sulu, Maguindanao, Zamboanga Sibugay, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga City, Sultan Kudarat and Davao.

Some 224 barangays received photovoltaic solar home systems and battery charging stations while the three other barangays were provided with micro hydro power systems. (Allen V. Estabillo / MindaNews)